THE GHOST OF YOUR FATHER

POETICS

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ABSTRACT

The thesis contains a creative text, along with a poetics of the work.

The Ghost of Your Father is the story of unusual childhood adventures in the small village of Ramsbottom, Lancashire, with chapters also dedicated to exploring the forests, mountains, rivers and family members of Trebija, Yugoslavia, during the long summer holidays of the 1980s. Remic's father, Nikolas, was a child of Yugoslavia, enlisted in the army at the age of seventeen and captured by Germans during WWII. He subsequently escaped from a POW camp, was rescued by US troops, and brought to the UK where he joined the RAF and met the author's mother, Sally, a Liverpudlian working in the NAAFI.

The thesis is a childhood memoir of clashing worlds: village life in Lancashire, contrasted with village life in Trebija, Yugoslavia, and is infused with the new dawning age of the 1980s computer revolution, and the author's conflicting desire to become both an author and computer game programmer. A strange merging of country life and 8-bit technology, of Tolkien fantasy novels and differing cultures and customs, the text reveals these two very different worlds, searching for linking threads, and is the source of what made Remic the genre novelist he became. The text explores life in Ramsbottom and life in Slovenija – and presents childhood adventures in the 1980s, and those same places and faces experienced a quarter of a century later.

The text contains a travel section detailing an account of the events that occurred when Remic returned to Slovenija to meet his long, lost, beloved Aunty Mary, taking his children on that same voyage of discovery he experienced as a boy, and which he believes shaped his imagination and fired his creativity to create a genre novelist working in the field today. Part memoir, part travelogue, part exploration and decoding of a child's-eye view of a world filled with fantasy monsters, pixellated graphics, mountain-top escapades and small-town haunted houses, *The Ghost of Your Father* is a book of contrasts, of exploring imagination, creativity, ethics, and the very twisted essence of subjective memory. It is a story of a child *then*, and a child *now*, based on memories, interviews and new experiences. It is a fictional representation of a factual past, and a factual exploration of a fictional present. It is the truth, perhaps not as it was, but as it might have been.

The poetics is an exploration of the writing process of *The Ghost of Your Father.* It's an investigation of why, and how, Remic decided to create this text, examining contextualisation, where this work sits in the field of contemporary memoir, reflecting on the process of writing the text, including how Remic was inspired and arrived at conclusions over memory, tone and research for form, and ultimately concluding with how this project has altered Remic's perspective of research, creative writing, and how it has informed Remic's genre writing and creative writing as a whole.

POETICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The original concept for *The Ghost of Your Father*, that of creating a text based on childhood memories and stories told by friends and family, followed by the creation of a further section sourced on new visits to the remembered places of childhood, is something that has gestated for the best part of twenty years. Various strands of the project occurred to me at different times – during my teenage years, my university years, and during my subsequent teaching and writing careers.

One strand of inspiration was instigated by the band New Model Army*,* and their song '*The Ghost of Your Father'*, which discusses the concept that whatever path you take in life, after a parent has passed on, their shade walks with you, perhaps like some angel or spirit watching over you – hopefully in a positive way, seeking to help (which is the way I interpreted the lyrics).

> The ghost of your father is always, always watching.
> And he waits for you, when the black tide comes,
> Do you feel the ghost of your father, waiting?
>
> Sullivan (1992)

This was a concept I found agreeable, although I perhaps twisted the meaning to fit my own needs on account of my father passing away when I was fifteen years old.

Because of this early separation, from that age onwards, I felt progressively fuelled to write about him in some format, especially as I believe he had provided me with an unusual childhood, a childhood which opened my mind to a diverse range of possibilities; a childhood which, I believe, aided my creativity, helping mould me into a novelist.

I decided to begin work on a memoir, which would build to a conclusion whereby I was forced to revisit my past in the form of a journey I had been avoiding for quarter of a century. At first, I intended to write the whole truth. But I became aware of gaps that would need researching, and as the process continued, a realisation that gaps existed which could *not* be researched. This is where the concept of *autobiographical fiction* was researched – the concept of speculating about certain events in order to fill fissures in memory.

In *The Treacherous Imagination: Intimacy, Ethics and Autobiographical Fiction,* McGill states:

> … 'Above I have called autobiographical fiction narrative
> prose labelled as fiction but identified as drawing
> significantly on its author's life' … In a certain sense, all

> literary texts are fictional, insofar as they are all discursive constructions – not the world but representations of it.
>
> McGill (2013, p.5)

I found this concept comforting, from a writer's perspective. When I began writing this text, as it was to be my first 'life writing' attempt, I was uncomfortable with the fact I would have to invent or speculate on sections, as this felt too much like the writing of my novels – something I did not want to replicate. It felt wrong, as if I was cheating the truth. Here, McGill explains that *all* texts are fictional – they have to be, as each person interprets different memories in different ways. This also came to light when discussing memories with my childhood best friend, Darren Ralph; for example, our differing perceptions of visiting a haunted house. We had undergone the same experiences, but when recollecting said experiences, viewed them in different ways; this meant segments of each memory, whether his or mine, had to be fictitious – not what *really* happened, but a representation of it. In the case of *The Ghost of Your Father,* this was *my* representation. It took a long time for me to become comfortable with this concept, but after much research it helped create the complete book.

My writing career has involved the publication (at the time of writing) of twenty-two mainstream genre novels by publishing houses including Orbit (Hachette Livre), Angry Robot (Harper Collins), and Tor in the US. My books have been translated into French, German, Spanish, Bulgarian and Czech, and attracted interest from two film production companies. With *The Ghost of Your Father* I specifically wanted a new writing challenge which would take me out of my comfort zone and ultimately improve my craft.

For many years, separate ideas existed inside my head, but I never seemed to have the time to begin work, to pin everything down in one place. I could never formulate a structure and get a plan locked down – a process which came so easily when writing a novel. I believe I was creating mental obstacles, because I was actually worried about writing this text – not the physical labour of it, or even the challenge, but the doors it would open, the questions I would be forced to ask, the memories I would be forced to unlock and probe – such as the night my father died. I wanted to write this book, and yet I did not want to write it. For years, I believed it would remain unwritten and I would carry it to the grave.

In 1997 I graduated as an English teacher, and after a few years decided to attempt to further my academic career with a PhD in Creative Writing. I then had to decide on a project, and it was evident that my various ideas for *The Ghost of Your Father* would

become a perfect project to undertake for a PhD thesis, a project encompassing the writing of memoir and travel writing which would include a range of research techniques. The research elements would include interviewing friends and family, interviewing my father's relations, digging out my father's military records, considering the ethics surrounding interviewing, deciding how to use the collected information, ensuring those interviewed were fully informed as to how their recollections and input would be used, and I could then focus on areas of writing I had not before explored. I usually composed fiction, so this PhD would be challenging, a serious academic stimulus through which to examine my own memories, the reasons I became a writer, and what creative influence parents have on their children. I decided to investigate the links between my father and my rationale for becoming a writer, as well as the relationships between life experience, memory, reality, identity and ethics.

The National Association of Writers in Education's document, *Creative Writing Subject Benchmark Statement,* states:

> The study of Creative Writing as an academic discipline develops a range of cognitive abilities related to the aesthetic, moral, ethical and social contexts of human experience. The capacity to see the world from different perspectives is intrinsically worthwhile…
>
> NAWE (2016, p.4)

Not only would I be challenging myself in a writing capacity, I realised I would be improving my own personal life skills, developing myself as a writer through experience and the very *act* of Creative Writing.

As a life-writing 'artist' I would be seeking to create a narrative that would adequately imitate a self-existence and a life-history – segments of my own life-history. For me, this was an incredible challenge, a form of artistic expression I had never before attempted. It would also give me experience in exploring the academic concepts needed in striving to attain PhD.

Looking back at those early concept stages, I knew my original contribution would be a text containing different types of life writing beginning with my childhood memories in memoir format, but then switching to the format of travel journal told by an adult re-exploring childhood, plus the links between fathers and sons, travel and creativity, family and success, reunions, and the nature of memory and creative inspiration.

My original contribution to knowledge would be a text which only I could write, because I (like every person) had a unique past; but I believe there are specific incidents in my life-history which guided me towards becoming a writer. Whereas many

autobiographies tell a life-history, I was seeking to do something different – by recalling certain specific events, and revisiting my childhood twenty-five years later, my aim was to guide the reader in understanding what had created a writer, and I think this structure is what makes specifically *The Ghost of Your Father* an original contribution to knowledge.

In *Contemporary Identities of Creativity and Creative Work,* which explores the meanings, aspirations and difficulties involved with creative identification, there is comment on continuous ongoing construction of identity, and Taylor and Littleton (2012) note:

> The project to construct an identity is ongoing and inescapable. Discipline and constraint become internalized as people govern themselves: 'each individual must render her or his life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realisation'.
>
> Taylor and Littleton, (2012, p.31)

It would appear that by undertaking this project, the construction of my own continuing identity would be ongoing and inescapable, and by exploring my past, analysing the role of my father in the construct I have become, that of *writer,* the quest I have imposed on myself may well be a result of the fact I am half British, half Yugoslav. I believe my identity was strengthened by my unusual upbringing, and that the writer I became was a direct product of unique childhood experiences. I believe the construct of my identity is symbiotic with that of my father, and this PhD would research that symbiosis.

2. CONTEXTUALISATION

I believe all (or the majority) of writing is creative. Various dictionary definitions stipulate that creative writing is 'fiction' or 'poetry' often contrasted with academic or journalistic writing, but I disagree. If a person writes, they are creatively writing – whether that be essay, article, poem, novel, memoir or thesis. Under the umbrella term of 'Creative Writing' there are the sub-genres of biography, autobiography and memoir. Speaking to the many editor-in-chiefs, editors and proof-readers with whom I have worked over the years, in my experience they have all agreed that 'genre' is a device used by book sellers to segment different types of writing for the purposes of directing buyers to that source of creative writing they wish to explore.

I believe in writing. I write, therefore I am.

> Being one of the arts, creative writing of course has a connection with these other artistic fields as well as with literary ancestors who have interrogated how and why they practice and, in effect, how and why they research in order to develop. In comparison with other art forms, however, creative writing chooses words as the principal tools and words are the primary outcome. Other art forms may use words, but they are creative writing's substance, its essence.
>
> Harper & Kroll (2013 p.3)

I admire the concept that words are tools, and that we, as writers, have a vast range of word tools at our disposal as we 'build' the structure of what will become our text and our child. In the case of *The Ghost of Your Father,* I chose the focus of memoir and travel writing – a return journey to my childhood memories and dreams.

In Barrington's *Writing the Memoir*, she states:

> An autobiography is the story *of a life*: the name implies that the writer will somehow attempt to capture all the essential elements of that life. A writer's autobiography, for example, is not expected to deal merely with the author's growth and career as a writer, but also with the facts and emotions connected to family life, education, relationships, sexuality, travels, and inner struggles of all kinds.
>
> Barrington (2002, p.22)

This, I confess, is a challenging concept for me. I believe an 'autobiography' is practically impossible; it rarely exists and can only exist if the writer of the

autobiography, on their dying day, types their final thoughts before hitting SEND to the publisher prior to end of life.

The Ghost of Your Father is *not* an autobiography. I would never seek to write an autobiography, one reason being that it could descend into narcissism, offering my whole life up for general entertainment, because that is why in the world of publishing and business, these texts are published and sold and bought.

In *Autobiography,* Anderson states:

> Vocation would seem to be the key to authorship and it is also the way in which 'serious' autobiography, that written by the few who are capable of sustained self-reflection, is to be distinguished from its popular counterpart. It is still the case today that popular 'commercial' autobiographies by, for instance, pop stars are often seen as lacking 'integrity', as debasing the self by commodifying it.
>
> Anderson (2001, p.8)

It would seem there is a fracture in the world of autobiography, the 'serious' and the 'pop star'. I do believe there are autobiographers who do not write for the dollars, or the fame, but to put forward *their own life story* (up to a certain point). One example of this, for me, would be Michael Caine's *What's It All About? An Autobiography,* published in 1992. This was then followed by *Michael Caine: The Autobiography – The Elephant to Hollywood,* published in 2011. However, now, in 2017, six years later, I am sure there is a *third* 'story of a life' to be told. How many stories of a life can one person have? *The Ghost of Your Father* is not autobiography, but rather, a selection of memoirs contained within a circular, fluid *story*. It is not truth, it is a personalised representation of a possible past – via subjective memories.

Barrington makes a powerful argument for all biographies and autobiographies being valid expressions of a life history, and I would agree. Every life story is different, and valid, and unique, whereas every opinion is born of subjectivity and it is not for me to make judgements on other works, other life stories. However, when Anderson discusses sustained self-reflection and 'commercial' pop star autobiographies, it is interesting to note that most 'commercial' biographies are that – biographies, often written by somebody without inside access to, as Barrington states, 'emotions' and 'inner struggles'. This means the unofficial biographer cannot ever create a fully formed picture of a life-history, whereas autobiography, created by that very same person who lived the life, can indeed show 'sustained self-reflection'. For me, this gives autobiography more validation, and is why I would always gravitate towards autobiography and memoir as a preference in reading these forms.

Barrington states:

> Memoir, on the other hand, is a story *from a life*. It makes no pretense of replicating a whole life. One of the important skills of memoir writing is the selection of the theme or themes that will bind the work together.
>
> Barrington (2002, p.23)

This, for me, better sums up the memoir sections of *The Ghost of Your Father*; I see the work not as a 'pop star' autobiography, not even a 'pop star' memoir, but something I have written for myself, and for my children and grandchildren, and ultimately for a PhD thesis. The fact this work is a thesis is extremely important to me – I believe there is a story in my work which is unique, as indeed most stories are unique, for during the 1980s it was unusual for children to go on extended overland trips to Yugoslavia during their summer holidays; it therefore adds something valuable and different to the field of contemporary writing, modern memoir and collected knowledge. My story has never before been told and these events helped in the creation of me as an author – my experiences informed *why* I write. In some ways memoir is a part of our evolution – just as our species seeks longevity through genetic dissemination and reproduction, so memoir can aid the dissemination and longevity of knowledge through represented fact; or at the very least, represented subjective fact.

During the writing of this thesis I became very fond of several works, such as Morrison's *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* and I see my memoir slotting in to that shelf of genre and adding something positive to that lodestone of recollected knowledge. I believe *The Ghost of Your Father* is appropriate to the field of contemporary field of memoir writing.

Barrington claims:

> Memoir, in particular, can be difficult for you to read dispassionately… You may think things are clear when they are not, because of all the background information you alone have… Sometimes your emotional investment in the story is such that old feelings rise up to colour the voice and tone; you may not realize when you have temporarily lost the consistency.
>
> Barrington (2002, p.164)

This is why this thesis has benefitted so much from the PhD process, which (and I will explain why in below chapters) has, I believe, informed me as a writer and made this thesis so much stronger in the arena of contemporary memoir.

> Inherent in the personal definition of 'family memoir' that I have been slowly forging out of these readings is the concept of a genre that involves the recounting of the search for documentary traces of the author's family members and, sometimes, the times in which they lived as well as the stories of their lives.
>
> Popkin (2015, p.128)

I have written a memoir, not an autobiography, for two main reasons. Firstly, I did not write an autobiography because I do not have the story of a full life to tell, and secondly, this was to be an exploration of my parents' part in my childhood – 'a search for… the times in which they lived as well as the stories of their lives', a search of my own, and other peoples, memories looking for the influences which created me as writer. Sections of my text are fiction based on fact; my aim was to tell 'a story' of several viewpoints through the medium of memoir.

3. THE PROCESS

With *The Ghost of Your Father* I underestimated the difficulty of both research and life writing. I expected the actual physical process of writing a memoir, because these were 'my memories', to be similar to writing a novel. This was far from the reality. In *The Art of Creative Nonfiction,* Gutkind comments how creativity is a spontaneous experience as opposed to scientific endeavour based predominantly on fact; creative writing is not a mathematical process, it is not science:

> The writing process is not a scientific endeavour, despite my emphasis on the anatomy of architecture of the essay. The writing process contains two integral parts, beginning with an essential spontaneity, which is the cornerstone of the creative experience.
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.48)

For me the 'essential spontaneity', the creative element, was the vividness of certain childhood memories of Yugoslavia which at times seemed more real to me than real life, more colourful and loud than any rainy day in England. With that vividness came a very real need to write a story, based on those almost hallucinatory visions of childhood. I knew the only way I could tone them down in my mind was to write them – an exorcism.

I began writing segments of memory, back in early 2009, sections of pleasant bright happy family memories, my vivid childhood journeys to Yugoslavia and some of the exciting events which unfolded at home and during those long journeys.

Yugoslavia, from the beginning, this Eastern European country, this state for South Slavic people, was in my blood. We travelled there practically most years, crossing Europe, through Germany and Austria, to the country of Yugoslavia – now divided into Slovenia, Macedonia and Serbo-Croatia. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, these were *states* under the communist umbrella of the country, and formerly states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War, the renamed country *Yugoslavia* came into existence as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in 1929, when my father was six years old.

> It took the destruction of two great empires to make room for the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, a new state created out of the marcher lands straddling the Ottoman and Habsburg dominions.
>
> Benson (2001, p.1)

This kingdom was renamed Yugoslavia, but to me, an innocent child, the political turmoil of the region which had existed for hundreds of years (and would continue after my father's death in a state of violent acceleration) was something I neither comprehended, nor considered. To me, Yugoslavia, and specifically Slovenia, was a place of magic, of inspiration, and dreams.

When writing a genre book, my characters, structure, plot and plan are laid out before I even begin writing the novel itself. Sometimes the book will deviate from the plan, but never by much; and I always know the end goal.

When writing about *life*, about memories, about people who are still around you, there are emotional attachments, and there are memories forgotten that gradually erupt to the surface of the real; sometimes like honey through crystal clear water, sometimes like a dead toad through a stagnant lake. Thus, with all the positive mental explorations I was conducting, out of that pot of goodness emerged some of the less pleasant memories which had been entirely forgotten, or which now, looking back as an adult, I realised were not as positive as nostalgia led me to believe, and which I had, subconsciously blocked.

I do not like to shy away from the truth and felt inclined to include some of the more negative content of my childhood memories. If the account is to be as true to life as possible, as true to an objective viewpoint with an equality of balance attained, this has to be the case. Jonathan Taylor writes in his *Take Me Home, Parkinson's, My Father, Myself:*

> Waiting for the bus back to Innsbruck, all I could do was ask her, with a smirk: 'Surely it was a bit scandalous, you and Dad going on holiday together before you were married, if you know what I mean?'
>
> She turned away. 'No. We had separate rooms. Of course.'
>
> I immediately felt terrible for asking, as if I'd borrowed my mother's memories and returned them scratched and smeared.
>
> Taylor (2007, p.68)

This is a powerful image – to scratch and smear a memory, to *damage and twist* a memory whether you are returning it or not; and that, I believe was one intrinsic problem with writing about my father, my hero. I could not bear, even subconsciously, to present him in a bad way, to scratch and smear my own memory of him and then present it in a public forum.

At one point during editorial feedback it was pointed out that my early writing on my father was usually totally positive – probably because of the romanticised view created

by my father's early death, and the desire not to damage my memories and his representation. In subsequent conversations we discussed memory and subjective viewpoints. I agreed with these observations and had the realisation that somewhere along the line – whilst to not *remove* any of the positive content – must at least show some of the more rounded and honest characteristics of all involved. However, when I came to do this, the narrative *voice* expressed did not feel right for the book as a whole. I could not forcibly misrepresent the past, even if that actuality were true. This project was to be a celebration, not a degradation.

During this period, I experienced a series of minor family feuds. These were brought about by the fact that my mother was deteriorating slowly in health, and her ability to care for herself. My brother and I did not see eye-to-eye on this subject, as I wanted her to remain independent for as long as possible, whereas my brother took the position she needed to go into residential care. Then there were her nephew and niece whom she'd treated as her own children, and who had become distant, never visiting, even when she was admitted to hospital on several occasions. This was all negativity which inhibited my writing, and forced me to realise that some of these family members, my brother, his wife, my nephew and niece, would not be willing to be interviewed; this was unfortunate, because as part of my PG Certificate in Pre-Doctoral Studies in 2009 I'd studied and explored the area of ethics, and wrote a 3300 word ethics assignment which began with: *The aim of this assignment is to look at the topic of ethics with direct relation to the following statement of research topic: 'I will write a creative and critical text called The Ghost of Your Father. This book will contain elements of memoir, historical research, travel writing, ethics and poetics based around the figure of my father, Nikolas Remic (1924-1987). Throughout, I will investigate the links between my father and my reasons for becoming a writer, as well as the relationship between life experience, memory, reality, identity and ethics.' Ethics will play an important part in the actual writing of the thesis, and for this reason the writing of this assignment is a good introductory step into analysing the kinds of challenges which may be faced.*

The composition of this assignment helped me understand the underlying challenges which I would face specifically with regards interviewing, and how I would introduce myself to my interviewees. Another ethical aspect I considered was that of writing about my father, now deceased, a person who could not defend himself against what I had written. This was a moral consideration I had to challenge when composing the work. Ultimately, I had to make my own moral stance and trust in my own moral compass. Writing this initial assignment was extremely beneficial as it made me more

sensitive to those whom I interviewed. This helped inform my approach to interviewing, alongside the practical realities of the interview process.

All these issues, alongside witnessing negative events in other friends' families, skewed my writing perspective and content. In genre fiction, it is quite possible to vent one's anger and disgust via a character's diatribe – and in fact, this can be a good thing to do. For me, it is a mental purging, a working through of certain issues via the keys under my fingertips. When I, for example, turn an enemy into a nasty character in my fiction, it is an act of catharsis.

However, the chapters I submitted around the end of 2011 were a mixed bag: a fusion of happy childhood memories, mixed with negative rants formulated around unhappy memories.

There were some large sections which could be cut, as they negatively distorted the tone of the book. I therefore deleted elements which I believed detracted from *the story.* I deleted that which was *not* 'story', that which detracted from the narrative, and anything that, instinctively, should not be there.

A. L. Kennedy, a creative writing lecturer at the University of Warwick whose text, *On Writing*, is a collection of blog-like advice segments giving snapshots of her life, states:

> Naturally, I don't believe anyone will be deterred by my mad-eyed ravings and negative rantings. Once somebody wants to write it's almost impossible to stop them without killing them to some significant degree…
>
> Kennedy (2000, p.8)

I acknowledge I have a tendency, even when writing fiction, to rant about topics close to my heart. I am usually astute enough during the editorial process to remove these rants, and if not, my editor will pick them up. Of course, composing like this is a valid way to write – Iain (M) Banks was notable for his rants and personal viewpoints in his fiction, which, as I did in my own genre fiction, Banks' claimed was a personal catharsis:

> I'd decided to brave the press on the one-week anniversary of my now near-mythical tussle with the beastly fascist Holocaust denier and all-round rotten egg, Lawson Brierley.
>
> Banks (2002, p.239)

I personally have always been more interested in *story*, and in *The Ghost of Your Father* I wanted story to be at the forefront, as opposed to a Banks' style rant or

vendetta; a representation of the truth, without the negative baggage one could bring with a rant. Much of my fiction is dark, and for this challenge I did not want to write darkly – I wanted something more uplifting, celebrating the joy, exuberance, naivety and fun of childhood as I perceived it.

When asked about writing preparation, for both his fiction and non-fiction texts, Iain Banks was quoted as saying, 'I do as little research as I can get away with' (Banks, 2008, p.1) and I confess the prospect of research – any research – filled me with a trepidation, and yet I came gradually to understand that the act of Creative Writing as a mode of research was both refreshing and inspiring.

Graeme Harper (2010) states:

> Creative Writing bears in its acts and actions, and in its works, the inheritance of our graphical objectifying of language but, most importantly, it bears in the activities of creative writers the inheritance of our human desire to make art from communication, and communication from art, to create worlds from the world we encounter externally, and internally within ourselves, to make these worlds so that they satisfy ourselves and give life to our association with others.
>
> Harper (2010, p.112)

With these ideas in mind, that my creative writing itself would be research, that I had a human desire to make art from communication, I began writing childhood memories, for they were more familiar to me, and an anchor from which I could begin, then spool myself out into unfamiliar waters and expand to create worlds from the world I would encounter externally during this quest.

I spent the first couple of years immersed in my reading list and writing what was familiar. However, I knew greater challenges lay ahead, with the planning, the journey to Slovenia, seeing my family again, and then writing up new experiences in a voice that would fit with the childhood voice of the memoir. I planned the trip to Slovenia, and as I was completing the writing of the majority of childhood scenes, my mother deteriorated and passed away. I can only write when my mood is positive – any stress damages my ability to create. This devastating event killed *The Ghost of Your Father* on 1st January 2013. At that point, I did not believe I would be able to continue.

After my mother's death, with the passing of time, I came to realise this text could become a celebration – which changed the book in its entirety. Despite the title of the project, my success must give equal credit to both mother and father.

At my mother's funeral I met a long-lost cousin, a person considered a 'black sheep' of the family – Peter D. I know he was always very, very fond of my mother and father. He is about ten years older than me, and I have remained in contact with him since the funeral. His father, Jackie, my mother's brother, also died when Peter was young – perhaps 13 years old. Jackie was 42 and died from stomach cancer. At my mother's funeral, I watched Peter absorbing stories about his own father from my mother's sister, Martha, now the last remaining Bragger to emerge from Liverpool in the 1920s/30s. Peter emailed me several times, asking if I knew anybody who could give him stories and information about his father.

Maybe, for those children who lose a parent, there follows a search to discover where they came from, and who they really were. We regret those conversations we never had. I know a huge regret is not going with my dad for that first pint, never having adult conversations with him about cars or football or his life in the Yugoslav army. That rite of passage, taken for granted by so many, was denied.

Peter is not a man to be trusted. When he arrived at my mother's funeral, although it was actually pleasant to see him because I know how fond he was of her, a part of my brain switched gear. What does he want? What's he after?

After my visits to Slovenia, and my cousins apparently cutting me off for no reason, a slow realisation formed. I had arrived after twenty-five years. They must have thought, *What does he want?* At the time Mary was very old and had very poor health; she also had an expensive detached house to offer in her inheritance. I wanted to scream at my cousins, but I must accept this is human nature.

With my children, I planned and we journeyed to Slovenia, just like I did as a child. We visited places I remembered from childhood, and I was reunited with various family members, but most importantly for me, with Aunty Mary. This was an amazing, life-changing moment. Other elements were difficult, but the whole experience provided fuel for the next stages of writing the thesis. I also promised Mary I would return, which I did, a year later in 2014.

Back in the UK, I set about writing up these events. I was ably aided by notes I had taken during the journey, by new photographs and the then-modern wonder that is the camcorder, whereby I recorded certain events which, due to the high-stress meeting with Mary that rendered my brain non-functioning, became an integral research tool and aid to memory, order, structure, even voice.

I worked progressively through the new material, occasionally having a break when events triggered an older memory, and I wrote up the new *older* memory in childhood voice. I found this a very agreeable way of working, although I still had some research

to conduct on my father, which I was saving until nearly last, probably because I was fearful of what I might find. I was happy to not have my memories altered or destroyed in any way. I wanted to get my vision of the past on paper first before the truth caught up with me.

In August 2014 I visited Slovenia with my children for a second time, and again this provided more content – enough content – for me to complete the text, although I was initially unhappy with the unsatisfactory conclusion to the book because of real-world events; things didn't turn out like I thought they would or dreamed they would. In fact, my fantasies did not come true – except for actually meeting Mary and visiting Trebija and Slovenia again.

After I returned, I finished writing up the travel sections, and then worked hard to restructure the text into what I believed was a format that worked to draw the reader through the text, giving alternating variety by switching from present to past events and back again. However, readers found my time-hopping confusing, and so I finally settled for a more linear structure.

4. MEMORY

In my author's note at the beginning of the text, I state, 'Memories are subject to decay. I apologise if I got stuff wrong.' In reality, no apology is offered and memories do suffer from not just decay, but subjectivity, and I understand now that memories can be biased against a background of fact.

I immediately started writing about the most vivid memories I had concerning my childhood in Ramsbottom and my childhood adventures in Yugoslavia. Many memories were robust and a joy to put on paper; I easily recollected visuals, acoustic memory and the order of events. I could remember certain smells, and even now the smell of cattle reminds me of my Uncle Alex's farm on top of a mountain in Yugoslavia. I never experienced farms during childhood in the UK, and thus my sensory association therefore links to childhood.

I'd written about a childhood incident with my friend Ralphy at a place called Ponderosa. It was a place with a stream where we built dams and burned Airfix battleships.

I was having a discussion with Ralphy about this event, where he swung across the dammed stream and the rope snapped; in he plunged with a splash. And yet we were both convinced different people were present, and our orders of events were also at odds. This confused me and Ralphy at the time, and we conversed about it. I realised that we perceived the same incident from different perspectives. Gutkind (1997) observes:

> Think back to your own experience with your parents, spouses, or employer. Haven't you been involved in countless conversations in which two or more people experience or recall the same conversation quite differently? Imagine putting a video camera on the shoulders of each participant […] Even though the experience and the location is shared, because of each participant's angles and nuances, each interpretation will be skewed.
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.123)

I recall reading *Strata,* a Science Fiction novel by Terry Pratchett, in which he discusses different alien species and how each was distinctive because, he claimed, 'we've all been hammered by different gravities on the anvils of strange worlds,' (Pratchett, 1981, p.52) – and I realised both Ralphy and I had been hammered on the anvils of different parenting and childhood experiences and relationships. At the very

least, it made me question my own memories. How real were they? They seemed factual to me. They were images and sounds and moments in my head, scenes I could replay. But were they accurate? To me they were accurate – which meant to me they were real and therefore valid. However, our discussion proved they were not actually 'factual', but my perception of what was factual. Therefore, is any memory true? It cannot be, for every person has their own perspective of events.

The representation of memory was not something I had considered before, and I always set out to write what was 'true'. Former discussions concerning memory highlighted that it was *my* truth, not *the* truth. This disturbed me initially, and in the end I had to release the concept of 'truth'. To do this, I needed to think that if this was to be a text about my memories, my perspectives, the way I had been influenced as a child by the things that happened to me, the way I was treated by parents and family and the subsequent overland trips to Yugoslavia, then they had to be *my* memories, *my* truths, and not influenced by some assimilated viewpoint taking onboard other peoples' recollections.

Earlier I cited McGill, '*all literary texts are fictional*' (2013, p.5) and I understand now how they must be. Once I understood that, I could go with the flow of memories and treat them as my fictional truth.

> Vico too understood memory as being essentially three-in-one. Depending on the view we take and the point at which we cut it, memory can be seen as memory itself (recollection), as imagination and as invention, and as such it forms the very basis of human thought as a metaphoric process, which is itself trilogistic in nature.
>
> Olney (1998, p.105)

Here, Olney cites Giambattista Vico, an Italian political philosopher, historian and jurist; he points out the threefold nature of memory, which in turn helped me come to terms with the fact that my memories were not pure fact, but extremely valid as a form of invention and imagination, helping relieve guilt I felt at perhaps not representing memories as facts I knew to be wholly true.

As I wrote childhood memories, in that state which I always occupy whilst writing – a deep meditation – the very act of recollection brought out other, long-forgotten incidents which I was then able to include in more detail. It was almost like a domino effect: once set falling they separate and take different tangential paths running at the same speed and in the same timeframe, unstoppable.

During the writing process, other memories were surfacing, along with fragments of long-forgotten conversations and tiny factual details, such as the rough wooden rungs on the homemade ladder my cousin Douschan and I used to climb cherry trees in my uncle's orchard on the mountainside by my father's old, crumbling family home in Yugoslavia.

It was like grasping the edge of a thread and pulling it slowly from the stitched-up cushion of my mind. Studying distant memories brought more details into focus, and more memories to the forefront.

Other aids to my remembering were discussions with childhood friends and family. Quite often I would hear, 'Do you remember when…' and my mouth would drop open as some incident I had forgotten was revealed to me – and then came flooding back in Technicolor. The chapter entitled 'Scallywags' centres around one such moment. I remembered the incident, and while talking to old friends was reminded about the people actually present. This is turn led to a snowball effect of remembering, until the whole scene sat before me, polished and new and gleaming. All that was then needed was to write it down, while rolling it through my mind like 35mm camera film replaying the past.

Reading about short-term and long-term encoding and memory retrieval psychology at a biological level, I was fascinated by the Retrieval Failure Theory (2008):

> Retrieval failure is where the information is in long term memory, but cannot be accessed. Such information is said to be available (i.e. it is still stored) but not accessible (i.e. it cannot be retrieved). It cannot be accessed because the retrieval cues are not present. When we store a new memory we also store information about the situation and these are known as retrieval cues. When we come into the same situation again, these retrieval cues can trigger the memory of the situation.
>
> McCleod (2008, p.7)

I would suggest that during the writing of this thesis I have accessed memories which have previously undergone 'retrieval failure' and found it to be quite a liberating experience – and a form of reversing memory decay. Everything decays. In a computer, the silicon sliver of memory can only recall information for so long, just like magnetic data on a metal tape. Over time, it fades. I wondered if memory was the same – with a certain finite capability for storage and retrieval. I understand (through

discussion) that there are personal childhood incidents which supposedly no longer exist in my mind.

> Tulving suggested that information about the physical surroundings (external context) and about the physical or psychological state of the learner (internal context) is stored at the same time as information is learned. Reinstating the state or context makes recall easier by providing relevant information, while retrieval failure occurs when appropriate cues are not present. For example, when we are in a different context (i.e. situation) or state.
>
> McCleod (2008, p.8)

However, retrieval cues, reinstating the context, be that a piece of music, a smell, or revisiting a place, helped me unearth certain stored memories during this writing process, during this research and self-discovery. Possibly, if one never discovers the right cue, then that particular memory has truly vanished – there, in existence, but irretrievable. This is one reason I have written this book – to preserve what is left of my memories for future family generations.

This happened during various research trips during the writing of this thesis. I visited my mother and father's old house on Stanley Street, places I played in as a child such as Ramsbottom Park, 'Bricky', the back-cobbled road leading to 'Skallywags', and my old primary school, St Andrews, in Ramsbottom; and then especially when I visited Slovenia on two occasions, the first visit being the most potent and bringing about powerful memories which I believed had long since vanished with permanence.

> You may have experienced the effect of context on memory if you have ever visited a place where you once lived (or an old school). Often such a visit helps people recall lots of experiences about the time they spent there which they did not realize were stored in their memory.
>
> McCleod (2008, p.9)

The visits to Slovenia, to my Aunty Mary's house, to Trebija, to Lake Bled, all incredibly important and powerfully influential places to me as a child, brought back a wealth of memories. It was as if I'd been blind and could once again see. As a result, I fully subscribe to the concept of Retrieval Failure Theory, in contrast with, for example, Interference Theory which assumes a memory has been interfered with or 'disrupted' by what we have previously learned or will learn in the future. Having experienced renewed memories due to retrieval cues, memories which were extremely important in the writing of this text, which then led to a more emotionally powerful piece of writing.

In *The Creative Writing Coursebook*, the essay 'Memory: The True Key to Real Imagining'*,* Lesley Glaister (2001) comments:

> That, I think, is the real stuff of fiction – memory blended, refracted, transformed. That is why something that is apparently entirely imagined can have the real force of emotional truth.
>
> Glaister (2001, p.77)

Glaister suggests fiction becomes more emotionally powerful when based on memory, on emotional truth; I agree, having based many events in my fictional novels on events grounded in reality (for example after a motorbike crash, when I was injured, I had a character injured after falling from a horse – and he had my injuries, and thus I could describe the pain with real experience) and transferring them – blending, refracting, transforming – into a 'fictional' event. Here then, in *The Ghost of Your Father,* I believe I have provided an even more powerful baseline of emotional truth – for I am not presenting this text as fiction, despite it having some fictional aspects, a recreation of dialogue, and what I call a 'constructed memory', which I believe enhances the book as a work of truth.

The constructed memory is where, using old photographs, I have 'constructed' scenes around the static image, creating dialogue which might have been spoken, and preceding and subsequent events around that frozen moment in time. I believe this is a memory because the photograph captured a moment in time – and everything in that moment is *fact*. The photograph is evidence of the facts therein.

> 'I couldn't write – or rather, I couldn't write the way I wanted to write. And so,' said Bernstein, 'I had no choice. In order to get my book going, I had to grant myself *permission to lie.'* To put it another way, she approached her book project with the three-dimensional frame of mind of the novelist.
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.117)

My constructed memory idea is very much a permission to lie, an approaching of my project with the three-dimensional frame of mind of the novelist – which is extremely fortuitous, as I'm a novelist by trade. To me, this is much more familiar territory. Thus, I would then construct a scaffold around that fact which is in itself a process of creation, and I believe it taps into a deeper stream of consciousness, and knowing the people in that photograph, knowing how they walk and talk and laugh and sing, a writer is able to create a perfectly viable memory which enhances the text as a whole. That is what I

have attempted, by both using elements of events I remember based on a photograph, and also fictionalizing a section of text from an image. I believe it works.

5. INTERVIEWING

In terms of methodological development and data collection, I have found this process completely different to what I anticipated. I expected all family members to welcome me, both in this country and Slovenia, and be ready to give interviews about my father and his early life. This was not the case.

I began by trying to interview my older brother Nick, and his wife Lorenza, for they have a library of memories I could plunder. However, they were less than cooperative (in fact, totally uncooperative and unwilling to take part) and I had to think long and hard to work out why.

Lorenza always claimed she was going to write a book during my childhood and adolescent years, but never did. When I completed my very first novel (age 17) I proclaimed I would try and get it published. Her response was, 'The day you get a book published I'll run naked through the streets of Ramsbottom'. This was very hurtful to a young, self-conscious and self-doubting writer. I concluded that the fact I was writing *another* book, but this time about my childhood and therefore our family, was not something in which she wanted to be involved.

For my brother, I believe he was worried about how the book might turn out. I don't know why, unless I flip the concept around and ask myself how would I feel if my brother was writing a memoir and it contained *me* as a character? Would I want to be a character in his book? Probably not.

> Writers must learn to be focussed listeners and be willing to commit the time necessary to establish trust between themselves and their subjects.
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.107)

With hindsight, it would appear I lacked preparation. When I approached Nick, it did not occur to me to set his mind at rest in the beginning – my intentions were honourable, and I assumed he would know that instinctively. I thought we had immediate trust because we were brothers, not writer and subject, writer and *object*. However, I believe I destroyed this avenue of investigation – this trust – before it even began, because of my naivety; it was an area of resistance I did not anticipate, and I was completely unprepared for. This in itself was an ethical issue – my failure in explaining my intentions at the outset. This was a research learning curve for me, and I had to learn from it and move on.

In *Writing the Memoir* by Judith Barrington, on the subject of writing about living people and the damage which can be done to them by your choice of what to include, she states:

> ... a good question to ask yourself is: Which decision is most life enhancing? Colluding with a system of denial that allows for the continuation of abuse or exploitation, whether it be in a family or workplace, is not life enhancing... I feel certain that, if faced with an unresolvable conflict, people's lives are more important than my words.
>
> Barrington (2002, p.132)

I agree with Barrington, in that my aim was not to show anybody in bad light (although this is open to an individual's interpretation, as ever); my aim was to present the truth as I saw it from memory. If the topic was serious, for example discussing exposing familial abuse or criminality, then of course it can be justified, although Barrington feels this is not 'life-enhancing'. But in a memoir of happy childhood? I suspect an author must make the choice based on subject matter. My subject was not to expose any criminality – and I would therefore never paint a negative picture of those I loved.
I recognise that memory is also subjective, but from an ethical standpoint, my aim was not to trip people up, both living and dead; in short, people's lives *are* more important than my words, and I understand and believe in that.

I'd learned my lesson with my brother, and so introduce my research in the correct manner (in terms of garnering trust, in allowing the understanding of positive moral aims, as opposed to ethical issues), and when I interviewed one of my father's friends, Stevo Obselica, who I believed would be a goldmine of fact based on his former friendship with my father, I was very clear about what I was doing, the reasons for the interview, and helpfully, I went through a process at the university via application for ethical approval, carrying out risk assessment and analysis of what ethical issues may arise, and creating a consent form for project contributors, with a project outline and a participant information sheet.

This focussed me on ethical issues which could arise during the research and writing of this project. For 'characters' from early childhood, with whom I was no longer in contact (or could not locate) I chose to alter names. I recognise not all writers do this, examples being Hanif Kureishi, Julie Myerson and Rachel Cusk, who regularly use painful personal experiences modified into a memoir and, seemingly, with scant regard for the family members they discuss. This usually causes such writers a lot of aggravation. Myerson, for example, wrote an anonymous column for *The Guardian* based on her own experiences of living with three teenagers. When it came out, her children were ridiculed in school leading to *The Guardian* deleting Myerson's text from its website.

My aim is not to cause pain and distress for the people featured in my memoir, and I

have found being ethically sensitive helps to achieve more during research, for the interviewee then feels comfortable and you are able to gain trust.

When interviewing Stevo Obselica, however, I hit a different kind of problem. I was extremely surprised to discover that he was not one of the original 'band of brothers', as I had been led to believe, who escaped a German POW camp in 1944, being picked up by American forces and brought to the UK. He had, in fact, met my father in the UK after the war when they worked together in a factory in Helmshore, Lancashire, and then were friends from that point. This was of little use to me in researching my father's childhood and war years.

Due to various circumstances my initial trip to Slovenia was delayed. I admit being too relaxed regarding the organisation of the trip – I knew I had a large memoir section to write and could visit maybe during the third year of my research. However, certain events overtook me, meaning a further two-year delay. In retrospect, this was an error of judgement; I should have made the trip immediately. Because of this delay, two of my aunts, Lily and Melanoe, as well as my uncle Josa (Aunty Mary's husband), passed away. This also meant Mary's living situation altered drastically, as I discovered during my first visit. These were serious obstacles to my qualitative research, and at this point I realised the ticking-time-bomb nature of research into a topic such as this. One positive item which did emerge from these events, is that the death of my Uncle Josa prompted Mary to write her childhood memoir. This was promised to me by my cousin Irma, but for reasons I do not understand, this family document is denied me.

When my mother died, I was utterly devastated. But this project forced me to do one thing which I now hold precious. I sat down with her, and told her about the memoir, and interviewed her about her childhood. An example of transcript can be found in Appendix A, alongside transcripts of interviews with my childhood best friend, Darren Ralph, and my nephew Paul Remic (who eventually agreed to be interviewed long after my mother's passing).

Other interviews I carried out were with old school friends, Darren Ralph, Richard Bladen, Kev Blades, Jonathan Cairns and my nephew Paul Remic – basically the bunch who went into 'Scallywags'. I also showed them this 'Scallywags' chapter to gain their ethical approval, which it did. I also interviewed Anthony Popadich, son of my father's best friend, Mike Popadich. Some of these interviews were carried out via social media, either by email or Facebook. Procedures put in place with regards interviews in terms of ethical practice were those of complete transparency, an open

explanation of the project and my intentions of use with data collected, and finally signed statements giving me permission to use interviewees words in a positive context. In these interviews I was honest and sensitive. These interviews went smoothly.

6. RESEARCH FOR FORM

Writing a memoir, containing anthology elements of autobiography, a recreation or fictionalised history of oneself, one of the most important aspects is that of form – exactly *how* this life narrative will be presented to the reader.

> Students of autobiography have been saying for a quarter century now that a self is created in the stories it tells to and about itself. (I find myself, for example, saying in a book published in 1980 – and with apparent confidence – that "the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self" [*Autobiography, 19].*
>
> Olney (1998, p.283)

Part of this act of discovery is, by gradual process (in my case), working out the structure of what I wished to present; determining a format which would work not for myself as writer, as subject and object, but in this imitation of self, for the reader – an aspect I did not initially consider.

I had a variety of choices to make when beginning *The Ghost of Your Father*, but the major one was what to include and what not to include, and whether this text was to be a complete telling of life events, or more a memoir anthology; a collection of memories based around characters and themes. This is the form I chose in the end for the memoir section of the text, with the second being that of travel writing, linking the past with present events twenty-five years later.

> Even if you decide that a story told in chronological order is the best and most effective idea, how does a writer know when, exactly, to begin the chronology?
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.55)

I had considered a linear structure in the initial planning stages of writing *The Ghost of Your Father.* At the time I believed this would be less of a challenge for me as a writer, despite the fact I had read many successful autobiographies, memoirs and examples of travel writing which *did* adhere to this linear methodology. Ultimately, I think I am the kind of writer who subconsciously likes to make problems for himself, likes to present himself with a 'challenge' even if that challenge becomes, ultimately, detrimental to the finished work; I therefore decided on something more esoteric.

I always knew there would be two narrative strands, the past, and the present. Many memoirs, biographies and autobiographies I have read followed a linear structure, such as *Angela's Ashes* by McCourt and *BOY* by Dahl, and this made me want to adopt a different approach because in my own works of fiction structure is of paramount importance and can be played with to create a kind of puzzle for the reader to 'solve'. With most of my novels, some serious restructuring always occurs near the end of the project, and this thesis was to be no different. Originally, the text jumped backwards and forwards through time, creating the 'puzzle' I had envisioned, but various test readers agreed this made the text far too confusing.

The text originally started in the present, at the end of the journey – then jumped to childhood in the UK, childhood in Yugoslavia, childhood in the UK, then back to the present – the original intention being that of intriguing the reader.

The way I structured the text during composition meant it did not adhere to a linear structure in a way many other works do. It took a long time for me to finalise what I considered a suitable structure for *The Ghost of Your Father* and even then, the form went through many different iterations until I, ultimately, returned to an almost linear structure.

It took a considerable amount of time to reach the final (more) linear structure of the main text, and part of me (personally) prefers jumping around in time because as a fiction writer I sometimes like to present a novel as a puzzle. The reason this methodology can fail is because the *writer* intrinsically knows what the entire narrative is about, as author, whereas a reader coming to a text blind must follow events as they happen – as they are read. In this case, test readers agreed the narrative elements were too confusing, and jumped around too much. I therefore had to restructure in order for the text to have more clarity.

> The best answer to finding a frame and where in the process to start is to isolate a point in the story at which a major action or conflict or idea resolution is about to take place… Starting a frame or story as close to the heat of the action as possible is the best was to involve readers and compel them onward.
>
> Gutkind (1997, p.55)

What Gutkind advises here is a tactic I employ in my fiction, and a technique I also employed in *The Ghost of Your Father.* Even though the final text is practically linear, the text does still begin at 'the end' giving, hopefully, a circular structure to the book as a whole, despite its central linearity.

For me (as a writer) this final draft gave a sense of fulfillment, finality, closure, in a way that the conclusion of actual real-world events did not and could not. Real-world events are out of my control, and the expectations I had when embarking on this writing journey were much removed from actual events.

In *Speak, Memory,* Nabokov's own memoir, he comments:

> I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness – in a landscape selected at random – is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy…
>
> Nabokov (1947, p.109)

This is an interesting viewpoint, and although I believe time is linear, and probably unidirectional, I originally believed I had folded my own magic carpet throughout the main thesis, with patterns overlaying one another within a non-linear structure; however, *I* knew the linear structure in my head, and for the reader it was too confusing.

After the first completed draft of *The Ghost of Your Father* was submitted to my supervisors, comments were taken on board, changes made, parts deleted, sections altered, we had a meeting at Edge Hill University and a very good suggestion was made on how to enliven certain parts. In a review of '*American Smoke: Journeys to the End of the Light',* Attlee notes a variety of writing techniques to bring his own text to life:

> Sinclair has come in search of the heroes of his youth, the poets and novelists of the Beat generation. His journey is made simultaneously in real time and flashback, as much through stumbled-on VHS tapes, recorded interviews and shoebox files as present-day encounters with survivors of those mythic times.
>
> Attlee (2013, p.1)

Sinclair's text inspired me to search for alternative techniques in presenting my own narrative, and I decided to present photographs not as static images, but as living segments, where I could construct a sequence around a static shot – fictionalising (to some extent) events that effectively came before, and which occurred after that moment in time the image was captured. In this way I could recreate a 'scene' as if it was a piece of narrative. I used strategies like adding the senses, so I would imagine how a scene would smell, how food would taste, imagine the feeling of wind through

hair, sun on skin, and in this way turn a static (often black and white) photograph into a living, breathing scene; a fully realised example of a fictional truth.

I see the finished text as an evolution, not just in events that occurred – from my childhood and the events therein, through to adulthood and a need to revisit my past by journeying to the modern day Slovenia; but also by the way the text is now structured, the text itself mirrors the evolution of events by the way it tells the 'story' in a more linear fashion. I believe this makes the final text complete, in a deeper way than it simply being a completed text; the parallel of life events and writing structure has evolved the work into a whole.

It took until the *The Ghost of Your Father* was almost entirely completed for my acceptance of a finality of form to set; for during the entire process it had been a fluid concept, susceptible to constant change. Now, I believe, the form is finally correct for the subject material.

7. VOICE

Reading a variety of authors, of both memoir and travel writing, helped guide me towards the style of text I wanted to create. However, I struggled to find the correct 'voice'. I found that writing about childhood memories flowed the easiest, for here I was describing events as if through a younger me. The sections written from an adult viewpoint were more difficult, and I went through several revisions of how it should read and sound; I believe this was because, in my childhood memories, it felt more natural to slip back to the past and speak once again like a child – perhaps because part of me never left that world.

> […] childhood is the part of life most people recall best, and in the most sensuous detail… perhaps childhood is universal in a way that adulthood is not… the landscapes I inhabited then are the ones I still carry around in my head.
>
> Morrison (2006, p.2)

Even without the 'voice', that of non-critical child's viewpoint, I decided to present the 'facts' (subjective as they were), to narrate the story honestly, and thus allow the reader to make their own judgements, a technique ably presented by Blake Morrison in *And When Did You Last See You Father?* In his *Afterword,* Morrison states:

> I set myself an agenda: To write about dying and not be deadly. To write about sickness and not be sick. To write about my sick and dying father and not be merely 'sensitive'… The book was praised for its honesty. But did honesty exact too steep a price?
>
> Morrison (2006, p.223)

He admits to non-judgementalhonesty in his own work, and I found this concept thrilling and inspiring – to not think about 'what the neighbours might think' and simply, seriously present my personal representation of the past.

I embarked on a recollection and writing of my own memoir with a cast of characters who were my family, friends and acquaintances from childhood.

It was a strange process, sinking back into the past. But the more I wrote, the more I entangled myself in the project, the more the voice of the characters solidified. I found this extremely different from writing fiction – where I could have complete free rein over what my characters did. Here, I had to adhere to strict guidelines – in fact, the strictest guidelines of all – what actually happened. I found this, initially, a much more difficult

process, and writing was slow. With fiction, I could hammer away at the keyboard and it was almost as if the book was writing itself. Here, I had to sink into my memories, and then think long and hard about which facet to present, the best way to present, what image to paint for the reader – for the image was very clear in my mind, like a movie on a large screen, and I wanted more than anything for the reader to experience this same visualisation.

I met with my PhD supervisors during March 2012, with much of the discussion about finding a 'voice' and a more coherent (and elaborate) 'structure', and many suggestions were made. I went away to cogitate and deleted 20,000 words of unsuitable text. Many of the sections cut were unsuitable because I came to understand they were not narrative, but rants, divergences from the main aim of representing the truth via autobiography. They were truthful rants, but they were more about me grinding my axe than reciting a tale – and so they went. Other sections cut were what I call *lesser memories* – narratives that were perhaps not as important (to me, to my story) as the ones I finally portrayed.

With this excision came a fresh understanding of which voice I would use, ably assisted by the majority of texts from my bibliography. These gave me a wide platter of examples from which I could pick and mix, and in which I had been immersing myself during the previous two years with a view to experiencing as many voices as possible and finding some concrete guidance.

The final voice was very much taken from a child's perspective, and I decided upon the stylistic device of not using speech marks to denote conversation. This was a technique I had enjoyed in Frank McCourt's memoir, *Angela's Ashes,* and I think lends the text a certain stylistic flair through its simplicity of language, and perhaps provides a link to a point in childhood where punctuation did not exist for the child, thus replicating a stream of consciousness in much the same way as Kerouac put down his own stories.

As a novelist writing genre novels, my primary aim has previously been to entertain the reader – and in all honesty, this aspect is an area of writing I enjoy. First and foremost, *The Ghost of Your Father*, my memoir, had to be entertaining, it had to present a narrative that would (hopefully) not bore the reader, but would offer the reader a gift, an insight, entertainment. Part of this need to create an 'interesting' work meant the voice had to be just right in relaying events of childhood. To do this I had to examine a variety of different texts, from serious works of a serious nature, to those of a more light-hearted essence. I was already a reader of autobiographies, but working on this text I believe enhanced my appreciation of biography, autobiography and

memoir by offering me the chance to experience works I would never have otherwise tried, and also by directing me to academic texts on the nature of creation, writing, memory, ethics and the art of the craft of writing.

The primary texts I examine below have been discussed for various reasons.

The McCourt text was extremely unusual when I first read it. I was used to 'unusual' texts (having read *Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess and *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welch), but the way McCourt recounted childhood was something I had never before experienced. To me, it was a unique voice and did direct my own thoughts on how to progress with my own work. It was certainly influential.

The Morrison text was recommended to me as an excellent example of autobiography, and again was inspiring in its honest approach, allowing the reader to form their own judgements on the 'characters' therein. I did not immediately enjoy this text but appreciated the openness of approach Morrison employed.

I chose to discuss the Greene text because I studied some of his fictional works in my Literature degree, which led through genuine curiosity to reading his autobiography. His autobiographical work was, in my opinion, as fascinating as his fiction. Greene taught me something, or rather, allowed my brain to foreground an element I was already performing in my own writing, that it's often the small details that can really bring a scene alive.

I will examine how some of the texts helped shape and construct the voice I used within the memoir. In *Angela's Ashes*, McCourt recounts his miserable childhood (with a few joys thrown in) in Limerick during the incredible poverty of his Irish upbringing. What McCourt does which is masterly, is simply present a situation in its entirety, with seemingly pointless minutiae, facts and figures, dialogue both meaningful and ostensibly pointless which also aids in painting a more complete picture. McCourt makes no judgements, has no rants. He simply says 'here are the facts' and allows the reader to form their own opinion of the characters in his text. I very much liked this approach, and after realising my own work had turned into a series of diatribes, decided it made for a much more balanced and enjoyable read. Yes, you could implement various negative memories – but simply present them to the reader without judgement. Present them in their entirety. The reader would come to their own conclusion. McCourt does this with skill, and interjects what is, to all intents and purposes, a story of childhood misery with raw sparks of comedy genius.

> When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while […] People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their

> early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.
> Above all –we were wet.
>
> McCourt (1996, p.1)

With that line McCourt gives a child's-eye perspective on misery, and shows a wry sense of humour, an intrinsic affinity with his audience and an awareness of their necessity to be entertained. Here, as well as presenting facts, McCourt cleverly uses humour to mock himself, assuming we are familiar with these tropes of Irish literature.

Throughout McCourt's tales of woe, misery, sadness and despair, there are regular bright and shining examples of humour. 'Doom. That's the favourite word of every priest in Limerick' (1996, p.38) and,

> Still, I'm ready to spend my life in the library reading about virgins and virgin martyrs till I get into trouble with Miss O'Riordan over a book someone left on the table… It's a book of essays about love and the body and one of his words sends me to the dictionary. Turgid. He says, The male organ of copulation becomes turgid and is inserted into the receptive female orifice. Turgid. The dictionary says swollen and what's what I am, standing there looking at the dictionary… and it's shocking to think of all the mothers and fathers doing the likes of this.
>
> McCourt (1996, p.74)

And finally,

> Anytime Jesus got hungry all He had to do was walk up the road to a fig tree or an orange tree and have His fill. If He wanted a pint He could wave His hand over a big glass and there was the pint'
>
> McCourt (1996, p.234)

What McCourt does is interweave his childhood misery with the sheer joy of discovery from a child's perspective, and this is a viewpoint which I found inspiring. McCourt's comments on the way he reached his own unique and distinctive 'voice' were influential.

> In the case of *Angela's Ashes* it was almost an accident. I wish I could say again that I was like James Joyce, who worked things out, or Hemingway, who just sculpted those

> sentences. For me, it was my method of writing that led me to it […] I wrote 19 or 20 pages of *Angela's Ashes* which is in the past tense, describing my mother and father coming to New York. And on the left page I wrote […] 'I'm in a playground on Claussen Avenue in Brooklyn with my brother, Malachy. He's two. I'm three. We're on the seesaw. He goes up. I go down. He goes up. I go down. I get off. Malachy comes down, crashes, bites his tongue and there's blood.' That was my earliest memory. And the next day I picked that up in the present tense with the perspective of the three-year old, me, and it felt comfortable and I continued that way. I just -- it was a glove that I put on.
>
> Academy of Achievement (McCourt, 2013)

McCourt made me realise I could write from a child's-eye perspective in order to submerse the reader in that childhood event more completely, and that by simplifying language, or selectively using a child's words, it would make the memoir seem more immediate and grounded in fact.

> In the twenty-five years since *Metaphors of Self* there has been a flood of publications on autobiography, books and articles that have undoubtedly increased and sharpened our understanding of this mode of writing but that have also, to a degree, fixed it in place as a literary genre with rules, conventions, expectations.
>
> Olney (1998, p.xv)

As Olney states, the 'flood' of publications about autobiography, and indeed autobiographies themselves, may have cemented various rules and conventions; when I first read McCourt I felt like he was breaking these rules and conventions, and I intended to do something similar, mainly because I found it a fascinating way of writing, but also because I wanted to make a conscious decision on what technique to use – and that technique was something that specifically contrasted with my own novel writing. My aim was to challenge myself and write with different rules and conventions.

In Roald Dahl's *Boy, Tales of Childhood*, there is a portrayal of life told from a young boy's perspective. It is a fascinating approach to present memories from a child's view, with simple language, with a child's-eye view of the world. After all, everybody has been a child and can readily empathise with a text written this way. Dahl doesn't necessarily use a child's simple take on language continually, but he does present a certain youthful point of view which puts across the magic of a given situation. This

was another angle I could use in developing my writing of this text, similar to McCourt but in a more innocent, magical and less crude (and therefore also less honest) way. I consider the childhood element is magical because it borders on fantasy – and for me, the fantasy of nostalgia, and my ideally remembered memories.

Dahl recounts endless stories, picking and choosing what he terms as 'the more interesting' ones, such as having his nose cut off in an early car crash by the mid-level glass windscreen, and having to have it sewn back on again, 'my mother said to the doctor, "He's not going through life without a nose!"' (Dahl, 1986, p.85) as well as the experiences of being caned by the Head Master after a joke on the terrible Mrs Pratchett involving a sweet jar, a dead mouse and a suspected heart attack gone wrong. Dahl presents a child's viewpoint which is readily accessible to children and adults alike, and I was inspired to use a similar process of presenting segments of my own text in a comparable, child's-eye-view manner.

On reading Blake Morrison's *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* I found I did not enjoy this text, written in the year after his father's death. Blake Morrison is critical of his father, initially painting a negative picture of the man who had obviously loved him. This is similar in approach to McCourt, and yet I felt McCourt was more 'neutral' and Morrison more, to use Graham Greene's words from the text's afterword, '[writing] with a splinter of ice in the heart' (Morrison, 2006, p.222).

> 'God Almighty, Arthur, why do you have to do this? Why can't you wait like everyone else? What if we meet something coming the other way?' Now my sister and I do the same, hide ourselves below the seat. Our father is on his own. He is not with us, this bullying, shaming undemocratic cheat. Or rather, we are not with him.
>
> Morrison (1993, p.11).

Immediately I was disappointed with Morrison's point of view and the way he presented his father, and this opinion continued up to the death of his father. As a reader, one feels the memory of the man has been tarnished by his son. It seemed unjust, a cowardly and back-stabbing attack on somebody who could no longer defend themselves.

In an interview with Sheena Hastings, Morrison states:

> 'I wrote it in the year after my father's death, and it was my way of trying to understand it all… I was in a bad place, not in a normal state of mind in that my normal

> sensitivity to what is sayable and what's not wasn't operating.'
>
> *Does that mean he regrets writing as he did, especially while his mother was still alive? No, not really.*
>
> 'My mother probably had more doubts than she let on at the time, but on the whole friends rang and said they'd enjoyed it. If they said they hadn't, she just said I'd made it all up.'
>
> Hastings and Morrison (2011, p.1)

Comments like this, and completion of my own text, made me understand Morrison's motivations more, and admire him for his honesty. I also realised what Morrison and I had done (were doing) was exactly the same: presenting our memories about a person who could not make a judgement on whether the world should be allowed to see those memories or not, and aiming to present the truth. I recognise that all our memories are our own; and it was my intention to present my father in an honourable light. But, according to my brother, my father never once talked about his years during the war. Why then, would he want his life parading in public? This is an ethical dilemma which challenges me, and one that does inform my writing, but does not stop me presenting the more negative sides (I fell down the stairs as a toddler, for example – parental negligence). Morrison helped by showing me a path to presenting the truth. He has shown me that you can present the negative sides of a person in your writing, and that it does not necessarily tarnish 'the whole'. And in all honesty, you should, in the interests of memoir, be truthful to yourself and your memories.

In contrast, *A Sort of Life* by Graham Greene is so beautifully and honestly written, the minute I started reading I could not put it down. Greene is a masterful storyteller and, it turns out, a masterful autobiographer:

> I particularly resented my father's interest. How could a grown man, I argued, feel any concern for what happened on a child's walk? To be praised was agony – I would crawl immediately under the nearest table. Until I had grown up I think my only real moments of affection for my father were when he made frog-noises with his palms, or played Fly Away, Jack, Fly Away, Jill, with a piece of sticking plaster on his finger, or made me blow open the lid of his watch. Only when I had children of my own did I realize how his interest in my doings had been genuine, and only then I discovered a buried love and sorrow for him, which emerges today from time to time in dreams.
>
> Greene (1971, p.23).

What I believe Graham Greene highlighted for me was a concern for clarity of the written word, a love of language, and the desire to order one's memories, to catalogue one's past lest it succumb to chaos and oblivion and be forgotten forever. I suppose this thesis is my attempt at immortality, for me, my father, my children, this *moment* in time.

> And the motive for recording these scraps of the past? It is much the same motive that has made me a novelist: a desire to reduce a chaos of experience to some sort of order, and a hungry curiosity.
>
> Greene (1971, p.9).

Greene's attention to small details in order to paint a more vivid scene is something I have attempted to replicate in *The Ghost of Your Father*.

After the mass deletions and search for a voice during early 2012, I spent the rest of summer 2012 getting the first section, the memoir, *right*; this involved writing another 40,000 words and modifying the style in which the text had been written. It was a focus for the summer and autumn, seeing as I could no longer go on my trip to Slovenia (see below) and I submitted these revised sections in October 2012. The rest of the year was spent in a dark place.

2012 was supposed to be the year of the 'big trip to Slovenia', at first pencilled in for April/Easter – but this time saw the beginning of my mother's accelerating health problems; she had a(nother) fall in March and was admitted to hospital; she was then in respite care for eight weeks over Easter. I moved my trip to the summer, but my brother insisted on residential care for mother. Once she was finally settled, her health started to deteriorate yet again. She passed away on 1st January 2013.

With regards my PhD, I lost a lot of 2012, and the first four months of 2013 before I could even touch my keyboard and consider continuing writing my thesis.

The problem was, and is, that this is a very personal work for me. For a long time I toyed with ending this project, not because I wasn't in love with it – I am – but because it was simply too personal to even contemplate writing about a topic which now filled me with pain. I know writers such as Morrison also suffered like this during the writing process of their memoirs:

> But after the funeral, and the cold hearth of Christmas, I sank into depression. The only solace came from childhood memories of my father in rude health. I began typing these into my Amstrad, as though to resurrect him.

> It was done blind, from a black hole, as catharsis, without an eye for publication.
>
> Morrison (2006, p.221)

Time is a great healer, as the saying goes, and after the shock and pain faded, over the course of the next year, I was gradually able to continue – to emerge from my own black hole. Eventually, the continuation, as for Morrison, became a form of catharsis, as I now added extra sections to the thesis on my mother and recognised more intrinsically how this wasn't just about the ghost of my father, but also the ghost of my mother – and all lost family members.

When journeying to Slovenia I wrote about the reforming of old relationships, and a renewed love for the people and places of my childhood. For these sections, I decided on a different type of voice, for now they were told from my perspective as an adult. I decided to keep the text stylistically the same, so, with a similar approach to dialogue, for example. Now, however, the voice became much more adult but, I hope, still filled with awe and intrigue about life and people. My natural capacity to explore has never diminished, even from childhood, and I wanted to keep this hunger ever-present in the voice used to tell the story.

I believe the final voice of the main text works in conveying an appropriate perspective of childhood. I recognise that childhood memories are probably more authentic, for to write from a childhood perspective allowed me to try and weave in the innocence and wonder which many children possess. During this process, I believe my writing changed, for no longer did I deal in fictional characters, but in 'characters' that meant so much more to me. This process took a long time for me to accept and develop, but ultimately, the writing of this thesis has allowed me to grow as a writer and develop a range of new skills such as research and ethical consideration, which in turn will inform my fictional writings of the future.

8. CONCLUSION: A SPECULATIVE REACHING TO THE FUTURE

When I finished the final draft of *The Ghost of Your Father,* I felt disappointed that it was over. I asked myself the question: what next?

This question bothered me for quite a long time, until an idea settled in my mind. *The Ghost of Your Father* never, truly, had to end. Yes, I might attain publication – which would be an achievement, to have this work read and critiqued in the traditional sense; but this book was – is – more than just a product for me.

As a familial historical document, *it never had to end*, until a time came when I no longer wanted to expand it. I think I will always be discovering new memories of my childhood, events floating to the surface, which I could use to add and expand the text.

This, I think, has become my idea for reaching into the future. *The Ghost of Your Father* will be a fluid document, even if it achieves publication, for I see it as a thesis foremost, also a book to be read (hopefully) for pleasure, but also as a form of archive which can continually grow. A historical document for my children and my grandchildren.

During this project, my ideas about writing have changed in several different ways. Writing and editing require a specific skillset. As a fiction writer, however, I use generic skills, and also a different set of skills, to when I write autobiography. During this thesis, I had to develop and refine these new writing skills, and I consider the range of my ability has changed as a result, with the autobiographical writing elements now enriching the genre writing elements I already possessed.

As a fiction writer, I rely heavily on imagination, and I believe this allows me to write at a faster pace. Writing memoir, I was more focused on memory, and I had to work slower as I pieced together the scenes from my past, and indeed, recreated certain small areas in order to fill gaps in memory. Working at a slower pace also allowed for fewer typographical errors, for example, and I think this forced me to create different patterns of sentence and paragraph structure, to when I write fiction.

When I began writing this memoir, I lacked confidence. I am confident as a novelist. With this work, however, my confidence was not in place, and sometimes I wondered if I would ever get to the end, both from the perspective of having enough content from my past, and from the perspective of doubting myself – would it make an interesting enough read? – but also from the research perspective. Would I have the skills to carry out the large amount of research necessary to complete? Would my research divulge enough facts to enable the writing of the text? Would I be able to construct a viable work from two very different strands of narrative?

As I progressed through the text, the challenges gradually ironed themselves out, and these questions answered themselves. By writing *The Ghost of Your Father*, the very act of writing continually built confidence, and with positive feedback and constant criticism, the text was moulded into a book which could attain publication. The one similarity between writing a genre novel and a memoir is that writing a book can sometimes be like solving a puzzle: all the pieces are present, it is the job of the writer to construct the text by solving the problems put in his or her way and attaining the confidence to do so over time. I have very different writing 'modes', and two major obstacles during the creation of this text were the death of my mother and divorce, both traumatic experiences. But as Morrison so ably points out (and the more I read of Morrison, the more I realise we write from similar standpoints):

> But the alarming thing about the notebook is that the words I set down when insomniac, grief struck and half-mad are much the same words as those in the final draft.
>
> Morrison (2006, p.223)

A large section of this text was written during grief, when my mind was actually able and functioning, and this also drew some comparisons with my genre writing. Writing the scene of my father's death, for example, was performed in an afternoon of tears. And yet, even when writing my novels, I recently cried at the death of a major character to whom I had become very much attached. This shows powerful emotional outpourings when writing both fiction and memoir, when I, as a writer, inhabit that strange half-world of composition, of remembrance. Perhaps my fictional worlds are not actually that different from my own dreams.

The writing of memoir I find stylistically different to the writing of genre fiction. My brain undergoes different rhythms, and I use different processes (fiction, a lack of research, writing with more speed and less accuracy, relying more on imagination) and yet I find that ultimately both formats are symbiotic; they rely on one another. I have learnt a great deal during the writing of this text. It has not only been a huge learning curve, but it has also informed my genre fiction style and skills and inspired me to write more creative non-fiction.

In terms of Research for Form, I have learnt a considerable amount during the process of writing this text. I already knew many structural techniques from my time writing genre novels, such as beginning and ending a story in the same place, use of flashbacks to expand on a character, the use of foreshadowing to give hints to the reader of what is to come; however, after exploring so many different memoirs I was

introduced to new ways of structuring that had never before occurred to me, such as Levi's *The Periodic Table*, a sequence of short stories which mesh Levi's personal experiences with his love of science; chemical elements denote each story title, and weave science with memory in a very clever way. In McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* he uses a very stylised type of writing, a very specific 'voice', and from these texts I learned to move away from the more 'traditional' voice (as in, a more detached and impersonal representation) which I initially had intended to use.

For this project, I experimented with several different forms, a learning process to see what 'fit' in the best way. The subsequent rewriting and reorganising of paragraphs, sections and whole chapters was research in itself. This has given me a new insight in the structuring of all my writing and has therefore informed my genre writing as a result.

In conclusion, this project has helped move me forward as a writer of both genre fiction and memoir. It has helped develop my skillset, from research and ethical considerations to the process of writing, learning and research for form. It has improved my ability to extrapolate information from photographs and build a story around them when the 'real' story was lost. I have become a deeper thinker about past events, more reflective about the past and memory and family. This work has helped me examine my own memories, and the concept of what *is* memory, and come to understand the diverse nature of what memory *really* is – a fictionalised version of the truth observed from a subjective viewpoint. It is a fictional representation of a factual past, and a factual exploration of a fictional present. It is the truth, perhaps not as it was, but as it might have been.

APPENDIX A

Transcript of an interview with Sarah Ann Remic, known to everybody as Sally Remic, born 7th November 1928, Dingle, Liverpool.

– When I was born your grandmother was taken into hospital, and her mother, Mrs Jones, said 'you're not taking her into hospital – I'll look after her'. That's how I came to be with my grandmother, and I lived with her until I was fourteen. She got me my first job at Swan Ink, you know, the bottled ink place, filling the bottles up. I hated it there and I left at Christmas. I hated it because of my bad skin. She certainly looked after me though, Mrs Jones.

– Was there just you and her then?

– Yes. Uncle Eddie, my uncle, not my brother [who also called Eddie] was brought up as my brother. He was there. What I can remember is there was Grafton Street down near the docks, near to Southern Hospital. I lived down that way. Then I was brought to live in the cellar, in Park Road, like a flat you know, a flat down in the cellar. And the relations, they all lived in the house, and me mam [meaning Sally's grandmother, Mrs Jones] lived in the cellar. Eddie Jones was my uncle, but I was more like his sister because he was there until he was eighteen and he got called up into the forces.

– Eddie's brother, Uncle Bill, lived down towards London in a children's home. And that's all I know.

– There used to be three big white steps, and it was my job to scrub them. I used to get them perfectly right. The roads were all cobbled. There were no cars, just tram cars that ran on overhead cables. When I went to school I didn't go that way, I went towards town and got off the tram near the docks and there was a school there, well it's pulled down now, you know where the hospital is. I can't remember what it was called. That was Dingle. Towards town. And then it altered over the years.

– My grandfather was a cook, a cook on – there were two ships, the Lusitania was one, and the Mauretania was the other, and on one of those ships he was the cook. There were two, I'm not sure which it was. It was torpedoed by a German U-boat. He was on it when it went down but got off. He was lucky.

– When my Nan died, I had to go back living with me mam and Dad. And then there was Martha, James, eight of us, and they used to chase me because I used to go over to me Dad's for my Sunday penny – he'd give me a ha' penny or a penny, and they used to chase me saying I didn't live there, to go back to where I lived (with my nan) which is how she came to bring me up when my mam was ill after having me.

– Jacky, my brother, he was lovely. Jacky was a bit of a boxer, I don't know if he went to boxing gyms, but I have one photo where he's posing with the boxing gloves on. I don't really know if he was part time, but he did do some boxing. Martha was the next eldest from me. I was only about thirteen months older than her, and we played together when we were kids. But because I was always living with me mam, I was fourteen in the November, and I left school and went working in the Swan Ink. You ended up with cut hands, washing and drying them all the time. From there I went into a little cake shop. A corner cake shop on the corner of the street where we lived, in Queen Street, there was only a cake shop but at the back of the house was where the baker was cooking, making the cakes, and the front of the house was the actual shop.

– What did you do there?

– I just got cracking, started there working in the cake house at the back, learning bakery, I was with the cook. When I left there I went down towards town, and got a job in a confectioners, more serving than actually making the cakes. I was supposed to be learning the trade but I didn't get that far.

– What did you do after that?

– Then I worked in another shop, like a cafe, serving teas and cakes. And then I went in the NAAFI, I was about seventeen, something like that [which would make this 1945] and just near the end of the war. I was based at Wilmslow, at the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. I was there quite a while. At Wilmslow, near Ringway [now Manchester Airport]. You had to live in barracks, we all done shift work, serving food, tea and coffee to the different forces who were billeted there. That's where I met your Dad.

– When I met your Dad he'd just come from the Air Force, he'd got demobbed and come down to Wilmslow and the NAAFI had a station there. One day a year when they opened the doors, like an open day to show people around, and we were there serving tea and coffee and your Dad – remember Louie? Louie was his pal in the Air Force. He was Yugoslav as well, and he got a job working on a farm near Wilmslow, and in one part there was a pub called The Romper, and Louie and your Dad and their mates had come to the pub for a drink and in that time when they went for a drink in that little pub there was another chap come, called Nicky, and he met up with them, he was in the Air Force as well, and he had a woman friend and she was a cook in the NAAFI. So she was bringing this friend to Ringway for the evening because it finished up with a big dance in the dance hall, it was like a day out for people, and it finished up with a big dance. It was at the dance I met your Dad. He'd come to pub for a drink then to the dance. So he asked me to dance, and we had a few dances, and your Dad couldn't speak English very well. He was working on the farm with Louie.

– Your Dad came in touch with Cussons [owner of the soap factories Cussons/ Imperial Leather] the company who make soap, and on his half day I could go up to Ringway, to the pub, and meet your Dad there and Mr Cussons allowed him to bring me up on the halfway to the farm. I was allowed to go in the kitchen with him and there was a big basket in the corner, and it was full of all these Siamese kittens, snappy little things, they wouldn't let you touch them properly. They were in a big basket in the cookhouse and Mr Cussons came in one day with this big box and it was a box of Imperial Leather soap, and it was a present for me.

APPENDIX B

Transcript of an interview with Darren Keith Ralph, childhood best friend, born 18th June 1971 who lived at 53 Stanley Street, Ramsbottom, next door to my own house at 55 Stanley Street. Used with permission.

Andrey: I've obviously explained about the PhD, and the deep connection it has with our childhood, both of us, and my mother and father. So I'll start by asking you about my father, what do you remember about him?

Darren: I always remember him joking, he was a funny man, always cracking jokes. Some of them weren't very funny but you could tell he had a great sense of humour. I always liked your dad, he was very kind to me. I still remember finding out that he'd passed away, it the first time anybody I'd ever known had died. I was so shocked, I didn't know what to say to you until my mum kept pushing me to talk to you. She said, "It's the same Andrey, he's still your friend and he needs your help".

A: What else do you remember about him?

D: Well, him and my dad grew moustaches around the same time, I remember your green Vauxhall Viva and blue Austin Allegro, and watching your dad packing the boot so carefully for your long trips to Yugoslavia. I was always jealous of that, especially after seeing photos of the Alps. We always got to holiday in bloody Rhyl and Prestatyn in a caravan. We always had a great time, playing football on the beach and taking Susie and Cassie for long walks, but your holidays always seemed so much more exotic. I suppose they were.

A: Do you remember that time my dad was taking photographs of his car and you kept sneaking into them, leaning casually against the wall in your Steve Austin t-shirt?

D: (laughs) Yeah I remember that, I could be a little bugger sometimes.

A: What are your memories of the ZX Spectrum?

D: My fondest memory is spending the whole summer holidays, and it was seven weeks back then I think, it was scorching outside and I spent the whole summer playing Football Manage by Addictive Software. My mum kept trying to kick me out,

and sometimes we did go down the park and play cricket, but I was totally obsessed with the Spectrum and that football game. Who was it written by?

A: Kevin Toms.

D: That's his name, I've been trying to remember it for ages.

A: Was it me or Brendan who got you into the Spectrum?

D: It was you. You bought one after seeing Bren's, then I nagged and nagged and got one for Christmas. 1984 wasn't it?

A: Yes. What are your overriding memories of my mother?

D: She was one really tough woman. I remember her chasing you out of the house and you had no shoes on. I can't remember what you did but she was trying to crack you around the back of the head. She had a bad temper, but then you were a little sod like me (laughs). I remember she was kinder letting me stay at yours when we used to line up all our plastic toy soldiers and have huge battles. Do you remember rolling a corky to inflict casualties?

A: Yeah, that was fun. I miss those days. When we were so innocent and nothing seemed to matter. I remember us moaning about being bored during the summer holidays, desperately wishing we could go back to school, then getting back to school and hating it after the first day.

D: I remember when your dad converted your loft, and us watching him do it. He seemed to do it really quick and my dad asked your dad for some ideas, then he went and converted ours. I had my bedroom up there and it was bloody freezing in the winter!

A: Do you remember the cubby holes? In the stairs that went up to my loft?

D: Yeah your dad built them in as storage but we'd squeeze into them and use them as mini dens. That's all we ever seemed to do, look for dens or bu8ild dens. They were happy times.

APPENDIX C

Transcript of an interview with Brendan Hamer, childhood friend and the individual who introduced me to the ZX Spectrum home computer. Used with permission.

Andrey: What is your earliest recollection of Stanley Street in Ramsbottom?
Brendan: Probably 1973, the year before I started primary school. I remember the leaded windows with their designs in our houses. Your house had high ceilings, and I remember having my clothes warmed on the shelf above the gas fire in the mornings.

A: What do you remember about my mum, Sally?

B: Well, your mum I remember as always busy. Not stressed in anyway, but calmly organised and doing stuff. At some point in my Primary School years, my brain had landed on, "Hello Mrs Remic" as my first foray into the land of being cultured, before we shot upstairs to your bedroom. She was always polite, but, quietly busy. Between 2010 and 2012, I was in poor health but I enjoyed several "long and winding road" conversations with your Mum at the top of Bolton Street, in front of the shops. I was a terrible mess but she greeted me with such kindness as if the 1970's had been yesterday. I said I would call round to see her but my health took a nosedive and when I woke up from that, well you know the rest my
friend. As an aside, if I went from your bedroom to the toilet, I would take a little time to slide down the stairs, on my hands and rear-end to try and work out what she was cooking. The food smells were amazing.

A: What are your memories of my dad?

B: Whilst I remember your Dad less, partially I guess due to the shift-work he had to do [he did not work shifts, thus illustrating the nature of fictionalised memory], the memories are really clear. My grandfather worked in Public Transport and I loved that, so your dad's profession choice being the same, I always "clocked" him. Your dad was what I would describe as a 'Traditional, quiet, hard-working English Gentleman". I only hope that he and his family didn't suffer too much in the Second World War years back in the former Yugoslavia. One thing I have as a memory is that, under the correct

conditions, he could be a "giggler". When he laughed, it was a bit like a special occasion. Weird, I know. By the time I was old enough and confident enough to have a real good chat with him, his time here had finished, for this bit at least.

A: What do you remember about me and you using the Sinclair Spectrum?

B: In this area, my memories are a little mashed, sadly a consequence of some underlying health conditions. However, I remember us watching loading screens, making our way through *Jet Pac* and looking into the boundaries we could push with Sinclair Basic and occasionally, some "borrowed" Z80 machine code. I particularly remember being blown away by your early attempts at text-based adventure games. I loved that. Later, I was to train and work as a journalist, and that, dear friend, is another story.

A: What are your memories of *Bricky* and *Scallywags*?

B: It is only a few weeks since myself and David, my brother spent a couple of evening hours discussing *Bricky*, in stitches. The main thrust of our conversation, was trying to remember how it was possible for an engineering out-building roof to withstand half a hundred weight of assorted rubble, thrown there by kids, without imploding and creating a singularity. And as for *Scallywags*, my half-baked recollections are too many to list and recall here. Suffice to say, the fact that it existed reflects the structural difference in our housing markets now. Housing of course, a human right and not a luxury.

A: Finally, what do you recall of Ramsbottom in the 1970s?

B: I remember this time so fondly. The Rossendale side of the West Pennine Moors, gave us and still does, a stable, calm, mix of town, village and country. What else can I say?

A: Thank you, Bren.

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